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Culture War II

In the April 6 edition of *The New York Times* appeared a full-page ad with the headline, "We—a group of intellectuals and religious leaders—applaud American policy in El Salvador." The sponsor of the ad was given as The Committee for the Free World, Midge Decter, executive director. But to read the names of the signers of the ad is to experience a sense of *déjà vu*.

The Committee for the Free World is a new international organization formed to combat Soviet totalitarianism and to defend "the values, the achievements and the institutions of Western civilization." A galaxy of 400 intellectuals, artists and scholars from a dozen countries have joined it, including authors Saul Bellow, Herman Wouk, Paddy Chayefsky and Jerzy Kosinski; playwright Eugene Ionesco; columnist Max Lerner; TV commentator Eric Sevareid; columnist and editor R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr., and scholars Bruno Bettelheim, Gershom Scholem and Oscar Handlin. Midge Decter, the writer and wife of *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz, recently resigned as an editor at Basic Books to become executive director of the committee.

Aside from some glittering new names, however, the committee bears a striking resemblance to the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which thrived during the cold war from 1950 to 1966, until it was exposed as a Central Intelligence Agency front by *The New York Times* and other publications. The C.I.A. secretly supported the congress as a means of enlisting intellectuals and opinion makers in a war of ideas against Communism.

An obvious link between the congress and The Committee for the Free World is the fact that the same people are involved. For example, Sidney Hook, the philosopher and author, and Raymond Aron, the French sociologist and political commentator, were delegates to the 1950 Berlin conference that launched the Congress for Cultural Freedom. Hook later served as chairman of its American branch, and Aron was on the international executive committee. Hook is a founding member of The Committee for the Free World, and Aron is its international chairman. Leopold Labedz, who, along with Midge Decter, had the original idea for The Committee for the Free World, was an editor of *Soviet Survey*, which was funded by the congress. Labedz serves as European chairman and head of the London office of the committee. Melvin Lasky, the first general secretary and organizer of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and later an editor of *Encounter*, also subsidized by the congress, is on the committee's board of directors. Irving Kristol, who resigned as executive director of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom in 1953 to become an editor of *Encounter*, is another board member.

Not all who were invited to join the committee accepted, however. For example, Prof. Ralf Dahrendorf, director of the London School of Economics and a prominent social

gist, declined. On the committee, Dahrendorf explained, he thought it strange that people who represented the current political trend to the right and had access to positions of power seemed "so defensive."

Although the Free World committee claims in a press release that "no money will be sought or accepted from any government or government agency," several foundations that provided nearly half its seed money have close ties to the C.I.A. The Smith Richardson Foundation of North Carolina and the Scaife Family Charitable Trusts of Pittsburgh each put up at least \$25,000 of the approximately \$125,000 initially raised by the committee. The Smith Richardson Foundation, which has C.I.A. officials among its consultants reviewing grants, provides management training to C.I.A. and Defense Department employees through an affiliate. [See Friedman, "Public TV's C.I.A. Show," *The Nation*, July 19-26, 1980.] Richard M. Scaife, a trustee of the Scaife Family Charitable Trusts, was listed as the owner of Forum World Features, a C.I.A.-funded news service, according to a 1975 *Washington Post* article.

Convinced that "the struggle for freedom may in the end be won or lost not on battlefields but in books, newspapers, broadcasts and classrooms," according to a press release, the Free World committee plans "to conduct a vigorous battle in the cultural arena." It will sponsor conferences, publications, a speakers' bureau and a monthly bulletin to "monitor" press reports, much as the Congress for Cultural Freedom sponsored conferences and a range of publications to fight the cold war. (In addition to *Soviet Survey* and *Encounter*, the congress subsidized more than ten magazines around the world and scores of books, including, in 1954, *McCarthy and the Communists* by James Rorty and Moshe Decter, former husband of Midge Decter.)

Through organizations like the congress, the Government subsidized editors and scholars who were selected for their correct cold-war positions rather than for their talent or merit, enabling it to rig the free marketplace of ideas. In effect, as Jason Epstein noted in a 1967 *New York Review of Books* article, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, "ostensibly devoted to cultural freedom," as its name implied, was "based upon lies." The formation of The Committee for the Free World, in 1981, revives important issues about the relationship between intellectuals and government. Its advent is a sign that a new cultural cold war is about to erupt, along with a renewed arms race.

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